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R 69

MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Q. How do these sales contribute to negotiations for a Middle East peace?

A. The sales meet the legitimate security needs of each of the countries and, as a consequence, will enhance their self-confidence and willingness to take the hard decisions leading to a just and lasting peace settlement.

The reliance that the three countries have placed on the good offices of the U.S. will be strengthened by our responding positively to the requirements they perceive -- and with which we agree -- for air defense aircraft.

To deny a sale to any one of the three countries would cause it to question the reliability of the U.S. and our commitment to its security. An atmosphere of distrust could prove fatal to our peace seeking efforts.

Why Now?

Q. Why were these arms sales proposed at this particularly sensitive moment in the peace negotiations? Are we trying to put pressure on the Israelis or otherwise influence the negotiations?

A. Each of these decisions has a background of discussion with the countries that go back two or three years. We have carefully analyzed the proposed sales and determined that they meet valid security needs and will not upset the regional balance.

Each of the countries has pressed us to act quickly on its request. President Carter has personally received appeals from the leaders of each of the three governments.

Once we had made our decisions, it seemed best to move promptly to avoid leaks and speculation and to give Congress a full opportunity to consider the merits of the proposals.

We believe by strengthening the confidence of the key actors in the Middle East, the sales will enhance the prospects for peace negotiations. We are certainly not trying to pressure any party; we believe our proposals are balanced and fair.

Saudi Contributions to Peace Efforts

Q. What real contributions have the Saudis made to the current attempt to negotiate peace? How much influence do they have with Syria and Jordan?

A. Saudi Arabia's contribution is based foremost on its firm commitment to a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Saudis strongly oppose the outbreak of another war which they believe would put intolerable strains on their highly valued relationship with the U.S., and bring about a return of radical and Soviet influence to the Middle East. Within this framework the Saudis have been active in seeking an end to the civil strife in Lebanon, have maintained financial support for Arab moderates and have supported Arab participation in a Geneva Conference.

Saudi Arabia has considerable influence with both Syria and Jordan, but, quite naturally, both of these countries insist on freedom of decision in questions involving their fundamental national interests, as does Egypt.

What if Peace Efforts Fail?

Q: Should the present efforts to begin meaningful negotiations fail, will we have succeeded in doing anything other than simply upping the military ante in the area?

A: As the sales will not upset the military balance, but will augment the ability of each country to defend itself, our proposal should exercise a stabilizing effect on the region. Nations that are secure behind their borders are less likely to take action in anticipation of an attack.

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Consequences of Delay

Q: What would be the consequences of delaying action on these sales for six months or until next year?

A: The negative effects could be severe on three counts: political, regional security and production considerations.

First, we start from the premise that we are meeting legitimate defense needs. We are selling aircraft that the countries are convinced they need; we agree with them. If we decide to delay in acting on their requests -- after we have already delayed on each of these sales for several years -- they are very likely to have doubts about our relationship. Politically, the support of Saudi Arabia and Egypt for the peace process is likely to be tested. Will they believe that we are truly concerned for their security in the peace process, if we are unwilling to help them with basic security needs through aircraft sales?

Second, if the sales to Saudi Arabia and Egypt are held up further, they may very well decide to turn to other suppliers. I think Israel's security rests on firmer ground if we provide the aircraft, rather than other countries which are less scrupulous about such matters as third country transfers, restrictions

on the use of the planes and the armaments on them.

Third, because of production scheduling, a delay in Congressional action on the sales will result in delay of aircraft deliveries. Deliveries for the Saudi F-15s and Israeli F-15s and F-16s begin about the third quarter of 1981. DOD calculates that for each month's delay in approval of the sale there will be about a month's delay in deliveries. There would also be a cost increase of about ten percent annually. Because the F-5 is not entering US inventories the production impact of delayed deliveries on the Egyptian sale would be replaced.

Delayed delivery schedules could have a serious impact on Israel and Saudi Arabia. In the case of Israel, the aircraft are coming in to replace planes which by that time will need to be phased out of the Israeli inventory. It is important for their planning purposes that the Israelis get on the production line with specific schedules. They have pressed us for a decision now so they can plan their modernization program.

The Saudis have a pressing need for the F-15s because their Lightnings -- their main air defense aircraft -- will be retired over the next several years.

Commitments to Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia

Q. Is it said that the previous Administration made commitments which bind the U.S. to supply advanced aircraft to Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. What can you tell us about the form and substance of our promises to these three countries? Did we promise Israel in writing as part of Sinai II to provide a specific number of F-15s or F-16s?

A. The previous Administration did indicate to Israel and Saudi Arabia that we would meet their needs for advanced fighter aircraft. With Israel this undertaking related to the F-15 and F-16; there was no commitment as to specific numbers of aircraft. With Saudi Arabia we offered to meet their needs for an advanced fighter and the Saudis considered the F-14, F-15, F-16 and F-18; we did not receive a formal Saudi request for the F-15 until a year ago. The Egyptian government had indicated to the previous Administration an interest in acquiring F-5s, although no formal request was made. The USG acknowledged Egypt's interest, without making a formal reply.

The Sinai II Agreement states that "the United States Government will make every effort to be fully responsive, within the limits of its resources and Congressional authorization and appropriation, on an on-going and long-term basis, to Israel's military equipment and other defense requirements..." The Agreement also states that "the U.S. will view Israel's request sympathetically, including its request for advanced and sophisticated weapons." In the context of Sinai II, President Ford assured Israel that we would continue to supply advanced types of equipment, "such as the F-16."